

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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R 301126Z JUL 73

FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2333

INFO AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

C O N F I D E N T I A L PHNOM PENH 7788

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, CB

SUBJECT: DISCUSSION WITH SON SANN OF POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN
CAMBODIA

REF: PARIS 20421

1. SON SANN REVIEWED WITH ME TODAY HIS READING OF HOW A
PEACEABLE RESOLUTION OF THE CAMBODIA PROBLEM MIGHT COME
ABOUT. HIS PRESENTATION VERY CLOSELY FOLLOWED THAT
GIVEN TO EMBASSY PARIS (REFTEL) AND FOCUSED ON THE
ESSENTIALITY OF THE DEPARTURE OF BOTH LON NOL AND SIRK
MATAK FROM THE SCENE.

2. I DISCUSSED AT SOME LENGTH WITH HIM THE PROBLEMS
THAT THE DEPARTURE OF LON NOL COULD CAUSE AT THIS TIME
UNLESS A SUCCESSION WERE VERY CAREFULLY ARRANGED. I
NOTED THAT NO ONE POSSESSED AS MUCH AUTHORITY OVER THE
FANK AS THE MARSHAL, THAT EFFECTIVE POLITICAL DIRECTION
OF THE FANK MIGHT NOT BE ASSURED IF LON NOL WERE TO
LEAVE (AND SIRIK MATAK TO FOLLOW HIM), AND THAT THE
PRIORITY TASK OF THE MOMENT WAS TO ASSURE THAT FANK
PURSUED A STRATEGY ASSURING THE DEFENSE OF THE CAPITAL
AND THE IMPORTANT LINES OF COMMUNICATION. I POINTED OUT
THAT IF THE FANK COLLAPSES, NEGOTIATIONS WILL NOT BE
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NECESSARY. I ALSO EXPRESSED SOME CONCERN THAT THE

DEPARTURE OF THE MARSHAL, WITHOUT A CAREFULLY PREPARED SUCCESSION, COULD LEAVE A POLITICAL VACUUM IN WHICH A STRUGGLE FOR POWER COULD ENSUE. FINALLY, I SAID THAT I TENDED TO DOUBT THE WISDOM OF MAKING CONCESSIONS TO THE OTHER SIDE WITHOUT ANY ASSURANCE THAT AS A RESULT OF THESE CONCESSIONS MEANINGFUL NEGOTIATIONS CAN GET UNDERWAY.

3. SON SANN, WHO HAS GREAT POLITICAL ACUMEN, LISTENED ATTENTIVELY AND APPEARED TO COMPREHEND THIS PRESENTATION, BUT HE CONTINUED TO STATE HIS CONVICTION THAT THE DEPARTURE OF LON NOL, AND PROBABLY ALSO OF SIRIK MATAK, IS A PRECONDITION FOR NEGOTIATIONS BOTH WITH SIHANOUK AND GRUNK AND ALSO WITH THE INSURGENTS, SOME OF THE LATTER OF WHOM, HE ASSERTED, WOULD BE READY TO TALK WITH EITHER CHENG HENG OR IN TAM. I INFORMED HIM THAT WE HAD MADE IT QUITE CLEAR TO THE MARSHAL THAT WE WERE READY TO WELCOME HIM IN THE UNITED STATES ON MEDICAL CONSULTATION AT ANY TIME AND THAT WE HAD IN FACT ENCOURAGED HIM TO GET SOME REST. I SAID THA THE MARSHAL HAD NOT THOUGH HIS DEPARTURE AUSPICIOUS AT A TIME WHEN THE REPUBLIC IS IN GREAT DANGER BUT HAD INDICATED HIS WILLINGNESS TO LEAVE IF HIS DEPARTURE WERE CRITICAL TO NEGOTIATIONS LOOKING TOWARD A CEASE-FIRE AND A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT. I COMMENTED TO SON SANN THAT IT DID NOT APPEAR TO ME THAT NEGOTIATIONS HAD REACHED THAT POINT.

4.SON SANN SAID THAT HE WILL CONTINUE TO TAKE SOUNDINGS OF OPINION OVER THE NEXT DAYS, PARTICULARLY AMONG THE MILITARY, WHOSE PERFORMANCE HE READILY ADMITTED IS CRITICAL TO THE SURVIVAL OF THE REPUBLIC AT THIS TIME. HE SAID THAT HE IS PREPARED TO REMAIN AS LON AS NECESSARY IF THERE APPEARS TO BE SOME CHANCE OF FINDING A FORMULA TO BRING ABOUT A CEASE-FIRE, AND HE PROMISED TO BE IN TOUCH WITH US CONCERNING ANY DEVELOPMENTS OF IMPORTANCE.

5. COMMENT. IT SEEMS TO US, ON BALANCE, DESIRABLE THAT THE HIGH POLITICAL COUNCIL REMAIN INTACT AND PRESENT AT LEAST
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A FACADE OF SOLIDARITY UNTIL FANK CAPABILITIES AND ENEMY INTENTIONS AND CAPABILITIES CAN BE ASSESSED IN THE NEAR TERM FOLLOWING THE CESSATION OF US COMBAT AIR SUPPORT ON AUGUST 14. THERE IS OF COURSE THE POSSIBILITY THAT IN RESPONSE TO APPEALS FROM THE CLERGY AND CLOSE FRIENDS LON NOL WILL HIMSELF CONCLUDE HE SHOULD LEAVE PHNOM PENH, BUT THE ODDS DO NOT SEEM TO US TO FAVOR THIS.

SWANK

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NNN

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